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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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MEMORANDUM TO GOVERNMENT DISTRIBUTION LIST A

FROM:

OTTO J. REICH

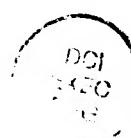
SUBJECT: Transcript of Pickering/Gorman Briefing; Talking Points on El Salvador; TV Guide Article

Enclosed are three items which I believe you will find of interest:

1. Transcript of the August 8, 1984, briefing given by Ambassador Thomas Pickering and General Paul Gorman regarding recently declassified information on external support of the Salvadoran guerrillas

2. Talking points on El Salvador, covering general background information, political information, land reform, human rights, and security matters

3. A well-written article on TV coverage of Central America, from the September 15, 1984, issue of TV Guide magazine



0358

EL SALVADOR

Background

- The reformist coup of October 1979 and the subsequent governments have demonstrated that an alternative exists to choosing between the extreme left and the extreme right -- a genuinely democratic and progressive alternative.
- The political and economic programs begun by reformist political and military leaders continue in force, although their benefits have been reduced by violent resistance from the extreme right and by relentless, foreign-supported guerrilla warfare from the anti-democratic left.
- The U.S. objectives in El Salvador are to support emerging democratic institutions, to encourage free elections, to strengthen judicial processes that protect human rights, and to support economic reform. Military assistance is not an end in itself; it seeks to provide security against guerrilla violence while democratic processes and economic reforms take root.
- The U.S. supports reconciliation based on dialogue and free elections, not power-sharing for groups whose claim to such power is based only upon their ability to destroy.
- The elections in 1982 and in March and May 1984 demonstrate the people's desire for democracy and their repudiation of guerrilla violence. Approximately 80% of the electorate participated in these elections despite guerrilla efforts to disrupt them.
- Activities to disrupt the elections included attacks on towns, burning buses and ballots, confiscating identification cards, and mining roads.
- The U.S. military training and assistance program in El Salvador is aimed at developing professionalism and discipline within the military so that it can successfully defend the country while understanding the need to respect fundamental human rights.
- Given the announced strategy of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of sabotaging El Salvador's economy, any economic assistance program without a strong military component would be ineffective.

-- Since 1979, gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen by 25 percent in real terms and exports have dropped by 40 percent. During this same period, direct damage to the economy from guerrilla sabotage is estimated at more than \$800 million.

Political

- The new (December 1983) constitution establishes a republican, pluralistic form of government; strengthens the legislative and judicial branches; improves safeguards for individual rights; protects the legal bases of the land reform. It also provided for this year's presidential elections and legislative and municipal elections in 1985.
- The Salvadoran military has played a major role in protecting and defending the reforms of the last four years. The land reform would not have been physically or politically possible without armed services support.
- In 1982, some 1.5 million Salvadorans -- about 80 percent of the eligible electorate -- voted. Only the extreme left refused to participate. Hundreds of official observers and international journalists indicated that the elections were free, fair, and representative.
- On June 1, 1984 Jose Napoleon Duarte became El Salvador's first freely elected civilian president to take office in 50 years.
- The Salvadoran Peace Commission has met with representatives of the armed left and is prepared to discuss the guerrillas' participation in free elections, including physical security for candidates and access to the media.
- The Salvadoran Government's amnesty program of 1983 resulted in the defection of some 600 guerrillas and the release of over 500 political prisoners.
- Guerrilla defections have begun to increase since the presidential elections.
- President Duarte has reiterated the government's desire to seek peace through dialogue and democratic processes; he has rejected, however, power-sharing among armed camps.

Land Reform

- More than 10 percent of El Salvador's total population and 25 percent of El Salvador's rural poor -- over 550,000 individuals -- have benefited. These Salvadorans and their families, who before had little economic stake in their country, now have access to their own land, either individually or as members of cooperatives.
- El Salvador's new constitution, enacted in December 1983, safeguards the agrarian reform.
- Land reform has symbolized the government's commitment to social justice and eased the intense political pressures that were growing in geometric proportions between 1978 and 1980.
- The agrarian reform program is restructuring patterns of land ownership in order to redress the inequities of the past, to respond to the legitimate grievances of the rural poor, and to promote more broadly based growth in the agricultural sector.
- The ultimate goal is to develop a rural middle class with a stake in El Salvador's peace and prosperity.
- The new government has incorporated peasant leaders into the management of the reforms, giving the peasants themselves a vastly increased voice in the formulation of land and agricultural policy.
- The guerrillas continue to see the reform as a threat to their very existence and have gone so far as to attack cooperatives and their members. In fact, guerrilla activities have prevented the extension of land reform in conflict zones.

Human Rights

- Human rights violations remain a central concern, and the government is committed to ending violence of the right as well as the left. President Duarte said in his inaugural address that violators of human rights will be dealt with harshly.
- All the groups compiling figures on deaths attributable to violence report a steady and measurable, if still not entirely satisfactory, reduction in the levels of political violence. Statistics kept by the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador indicate that politically motivated murders have declined from a high of 800 per month in late 1980 to fewer than 60 in May 1984.

- Other sources report differing figures. One widely-quoted source, Tutela Legal, appears at times to include guerrilla casualties on the battlefield as civilian deaths, thereby grossly inflating the level of violence actually experienced by civilian non-combatants.
- Major efforts are underway to ensure more effective functioning of the criminal justice system. The U.S. is assisting the Salvadoran Government in developing programs to improve judicial protection and investigative capacities; to increase the proficiency of jurists and lawyers; and to modernize penal and evidentiary codes.
- An example of progress in judicial reform: those responsible for the murder of the five U.S. churchwomen have been found guilty by a jury and received the maximum sentence, 30 years in prison.
- The Government of El Salvador continues its efforts to curb the violence of the far right. The Armed Forces High Command has on numerous occasions publicly broadcast its opposition to violence by death squads and has issued strict new orders to combat such violence.
- In addition, in June 1984 the Government disbanded a unit of the Treasury Police which had been suspected of involvement in death squad activities.
- Civilian and military officers suspected of violent far-right activity have been removed from their positions and, in some cases, sent abroad.
- President Duarte has announced that he will form a high level commission to root out terrorists and military officers who abuse their authority.

Security

- An estimated 9,000-11,000 armed guerrillas are now actively engaged in the field against the Salvadoran Armed Forces.
- The guerrilla strategy of sabotaging the economy has hurt the poor and has cost the guerrillas popular support.
- Forced recruitment of Salvadorans by the FMLN guerrillas has increased dramatically. It is estimated that between 600 and 800 youths were kidnapped in April and May of 1984. The Catholic Church has asked the FMLN to release those kidnapped and to demonstrate a respectful attitude toward the civilian population.

- Roughly 1,500 Salvadoran residents from the area of Sabanetas have fled because of guerrilla recruitment efforts and have asked Honduran authorities to help them return to areas under government control in El Salvador.
- The guerrillas' training, communications, and armaments have improved greatly; however, guerrilla activities since 1980 do not indicate any expansion of influence among the general population. The people refused the call for a general uprising which the guerrillas made during their "final" offensive of January 1981, on three occasions rejected the guerrillas by participating in elections, and have generally ignored guerrilla attempts to expand their ranks.
- U.S. military assistance has been an important element in preventing a guerrilla victory. In addition to providing arms, ammunition, and logistical support, the U.S. has helped train soldiers and officers in the fundamental requirements of a professional and disciplined force. This training emphasizes the obligations of a soldier to the people and country in whose name he serves. Those who have been trained are showing promising results. There is a need to reinforce this pattern by continuing such training.
- Since the presidential elections, the Government of El Salvador has continued its remuneration program -- i.e., paying cash -- for surrendered military equipment by Salvadorans, particularly FMLN guerrillas. The results to date have been encouraging.

July 1984
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Why TV Is...

Missing the Picture in Central America

Nightly news coverage is a patchwork of surface events that fails to capture the realities behind the guerrilla conflicts and East-West tensions.

By John Weisman

The large, starkly modern airport is an air-conditioned oasis from the summer's sticky heat. Baggage claim runs smoothly and, once you're outside, a police security guard points you toward a line of yellow taxis. The trip to the hotel begins with a 16-mile ride along a four-lane superhighway recently blasted from rocky hills. In town, after a 20-minute drive, there are bustling shopping centers, supermarkets and the cacophony of heavy traffic on crowded streets. People line up at McDonald's for hamburgers and fries.

You have arrived. You →



are in the middle of San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador.

Surprised?

Probably. Because it, like most Americans, you've gotten your information about Central America from what's available on ABC's *World News Tonight*, the CBS *Evening News* with Dan Rather, and NBC *Nightly News*. You've been prepared for a nation at war, its mean streets littered with the gruesome victims of right-wing death squads.

"There is a TV story to be told down here that isn't being told," says Kenneth W. Bleakley, the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador. "And if there's one indication of it, it is that we have a constant stream of visitors through here. Some of them are harsh critics, some dyed-in-the-wool supporters. But invariably, El Salvador is nothing like what they expected—and that, to me, is the major criticism that the press, particularly the TV people, are doing something wrong. Virtually every American who comes to El Salvador is surprised by what he finds."

To see how well the nightly news programs, with their combined audience of more than 46 million viewers, cover the complex story of and the issues surrounding Central America, TV Guide examined 661 news stories about El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama broadcast by ABC, CBS and NBC over almost nine months—from July 1, 1983 to March 26, 1984. There were almost 115 hours of coverage in all, ranging from short, anchor-read "tell" stories to five-minute background features.

The overall impression left by those 15 hours is a broad montage of images. Salvadorean soldiers (no more than boys) lying wounded; guerrillas playing guitars around campfires; CIA-sponsored Contras training to fight the Nicaraguan Sandinista government; survivors burying their dead.

There were White House announcements, State Department pronouncements, Congressional denunciations; there was network diagnosis, analysis and hypothesis. There were buzzwords and catch phrases, computer-generated maps and

elaborate graphics. One network even distributed a brochure of background information about Central America.

And yet, the overwhelming conclusion after all those miles of videotape, all those interviews, all that combat footage, is that one ends up knowing almost as little about Central America, and why the United States is involved there, as one knew before looking at those 661 news spots.

That conclusion is not unfamiliar to the networks. Says CBS News anchor Dan Rather, "Our difficulty in covering Central America, as it is with so many other places in the world, is complexity. Television has difficulty with depth. We know that."

We try to compensate for that. We try to address ourselves to that. We have trouble with depth. We have trouble with stories of complexity."

Indeed, the networks' failure to provide viewers with comprehensive coverage of the issues surrounding Central America, or the way they deal with issues—either piecemeal or disjointedly—goes to the very core of whether or not the nightly news programs can and do inform the Nation adequately about complex issues of major consequence. As Rather says, "I think CBS News is very good at covering news stories. I'm not sure that we're all that good at covering the issues."

Just how good are the networks at covering news stories—and the issues? And why don't we learn more about Central America from the nightly news? The answers depend on whom you talk to.

At the networks, there is a lot of focus on the time constraints posed by half-hour news shows, which are paged to 22 minutes after commercials and network promos. Robert Murphy, ABC News vice-president news coverage, says that even asking such questions is "unfair to ABC, particularly, to be so narrow in your judgment of an entire news division based on what is, in terms of a newspaper, the front page. *World News Tonight* is our most important broadcast, but the limits of that broadcast—the time limits—are well known."

But American diplomats who deal →

with Central America on a daily basis tend to have more substantial—and perhaps revealing—opinions. Kenneth W. Bleakley says that issues often are bypassed because stories on the nightly news shows tend to provide a slice of life without putting it into perspective.

The sort of thing, says Bleakley, where a correspondent "is standing there and

if ever, do we get coverage of those kinds of issues."

Item: Only one network, CBS, covered Peace Corps activities in Honduras during TV Guide's eight-month survey. None of the networks dealt in depth with Honduras's economic problems (it is the poorest nation in the region), although its president, Dr. Roberto Suazo Cordova, earns a combination of salary and perks that is estimated by U.S. officials to run into the millions of dollars); with agrarian reform, with Honduran labor unions (some of the strongest in Central America); with the influential—and wealthy—Palestinian community in Honduras or, for that matter, with American economic aid.

"I get the feeling that all they want back in New York is bodies," says an ABC Central America staffer. "Well, we don't have bodies in Honduras—yet." The staffer, who asks not to be named, goes on to list a half-dozen stories ABC had not covered during TV Guide's research period. They include the Israeli and Argentine influence in Honduras; an influx, back in 1982-83, of disciples of the cult leader Sun Myung Moon, who helped move the university in Tegucigalpa from left to right of center politically; and an organization called APRHO, which has ties to the far-right wing of Honduran politics.

ABC correspondent Peter Collins says that he has "kicked around story ideas on those subjects." But he adds, "I haven't made them as specific proposals to people in New York."

Why not? Says Collins: "I think that one of the good rules of television is, 'Don't propose something that is not likely to get done, or not likely to get on TV.'"

Collins says that there is no "predilection" on the part of ABC executives to favor military stories over economic ones. But, he adds, "I think that what is more likely or more close to the truth, is that such [military] stories are easier to get than the others, in the sense that the visuals are easier to collect. It's true—they are more dramatic—but they are also more...headline-making, not just in television, but in other major media as well."

Jeffrey R. Biggs, director of the office of press and public affairs in the State Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, says that because the nightly news shows tend to cover the day's top stories, they often omit much of the basic background necessary to understand that story. "Today you're talking about the church and the state. tomorrow you are talking about death squads. the next day you are talking about military exercises in Honduras. the next day about Guerrilla activities. the next day about an election. "Once you get the media geared up, with bureaus and crews in Central America on an almost permanent basis, they are treating the news of today, but frequently in no broad or historic context."

Item: July 18, 1983 ABC anchor Peter Jennings introduced a report on the fourth anniversary of Nicaragua's revolution, "which toppled Anastasio Somoza and brought the Sandinista government to power." Correspondent John Quiñones focused on Nicaraguan-U.S. relations, and the Sandinistas' attempt to "portray Nicaragua as a peace-loving nation."

The next night, Quiñones broadcast a second report from Managua, filled with visuals of the 150,000 "flag-waving and slogan-chanting Nicaraguans [who] turned out for the fourth anniversary of the Sandinista revolution."

The two reports totaled more than four minutes of ABC's precious air time. No basic facts about the condition of the Sandinista revolution at the age of four.

No mention of the Nicaraguan economy, which is in shambles.

No mention of the estimated 2000 Cuban, 1500 Russian, and assorted Bulgarian, East German, PLO and Libyan military advisers who help the Sandinistas train their army, the area's largest.

No mention of the fact that the Catholic Church hierarchy in Nicaragua is largely opposed to the Sandinista regime, although it had supported the Sandinistas during the Somoza days.

No mention of the press censorship in Nicaragua.

No mention of any developments—positive or negative—in Nicaraguan society since the revolution. Indeed, the Sandinistas have improved health care (with the aid of Cuban doctors and health workers) and education (with help from an estimated 2000 Cuban teachers).

Facts, figures, language and pictures are sometimes used loosely by the networks as they cover Central America.

Item: CBS reported on July 24, 1983, that the war in El Salvador had claimed "more than 42,000 lives." On Oct. 11, the casually figures had changed correspond Gary Shepard said that the "four-year-old civil war . . . has now taken an estimated 37,000 lives."

Item: ABC's Richard Threlkeld, on *World News Tonight*, Oct. 14, 1983, used pictures of U.S. combat aircraft to illustrate his assertion that "U.S. planes now litter the sky" over Honduras.

The problem: there are no U.S. combat aircraft in Honduras. If Threlkeld had shown pictures of C-130 Hercules transports, he would have been accurate, as scores of those have "littered" the skies" bringing tons of military supplies into Honduras.

Item: On Sept. 8, Brokaw announced that NBC News had prepared a background primer on Central America. In the introduction to the pamphlet, "Central America in Turmoil," he wrote "...to begin to understand what is at stake it's crucial to have a few primary facts in hand..."

The problem: NBC News' pamphlet, written by its on-the-scene correspondents and news staffers, was rife with errors. In a letter to Reuven Frank, who was then president of NBC News, Otto J. Reich, the State Department's coordinator for public diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, noted that (among other things) NBC misnamed the president of Guatemala in 1954.

NBC listed the current U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala as "Frederick Chapin." "Although our Ambassador would probably appreciate the reference to the famous composer Chopin," wrote Reich, "his name is Chapin."

NBC misidentified one of the four →

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main guerrilla factions in Guatemala. NBC got the population of Honduras and its capital, Tegucigalpa, wrong.

NBC misreported the amount of economic aid going to Honduras.

NBC said that the Honduran Congress is made up of 24 members elected for six years. It is not; the Honduran Congress is composed of 82 members who are elected for four years.

Says Brokaw, "[t]here were those kinds of errors, it's appalling."

There were visual inaccuracies as well. News executives at all three networks insist that they have hard and fast rules about the use of file footage—videotape shot at one point in time and used later as a visual element of a story for which it was not shot.

As Lane Venardos, executive producer of the *CBS Evening News*, says, "We're sensitive to this. And it seems to me that we put a large number of file-tape supers [words that appear over pictures identifying them as file footage] up there—sometimes so many times in one piece that I find it distracting."

Why such an emphasis on file-tape supers? Because, says Venardos, use of old footage in a new story without letting viewers know it "is dishonest." The only conclusion a viewer can come to, based on the way television news operates, is that [what they're seeing] happened today—not in April of 83, or April of 84, or last month—or last week."

Item: Dozens of times over TV Guide's research period, ABC's viewers found themselves looking at unmarked, unlabeled file footage, apparent violations of ABC's news guidelines.

When told about them, ABC's Robert Murphy said that if network policy "was being violated that many times, there would be some action taken by senior executives."

In July 1983 alone, more than a dozen ABC reports about Central America misled viewers by not indicating the footage they were seeing was file tape.

A July 5 spot by correspondent Anne Garrels about the appointment of diplomatic

Otto Reich to a new State Department post contained pictures of what were apparently Salvadoran guerrillas without any indication of who they were, or when the film had been shot.

On July 11, a spot from correspondent John Quiñones in La Palma, El Salvador, used the same guerrilla pictures as the July 5 Garrels spot—with no indication that they were file footage.

On July 18, a report by Jack Smith looked at the Salvadoran army. Smith's spot included, unlabeled, some of the same sequences used in John Quiñones' July 11 piece on the Salvadoran army.

On July 19, correspondent Charles Gibson's piece about covert aid to the U.S.-supported Contras fighting against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua contained footage of the Contras without any indication that it was file footage.

There were at least nine other mislabelings of file footage by ABC that month on July 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 27 (two reports) and 28 (two reports).

As for the other networks, CBS and NBC had, between them, fewer than a dozen instances of unlabeled file footage during TV Guide's eight-month research period—less than ABC's total for July alone.

"I don't mind talking about issues," says CBS's Dan Rather. "And I certainly think we have a responsibility to cover issues and deal with issues. But having said that, I do think it's important that our audience understand what it is we see ourselves trying to do."

"We are trying to cover the news. Some times that includes dealing with 'issues' and other times it has to do with showing telling what life is like for one person in one moment of that person's life. This is the news business. This is not stale problems in the news business. This is not stale problems in the news business. This is journalism. That's what journalism's about."

ABC reports about Central America misled viewers by not indicating the footage they were seeing was file tape.

A July 5 spot by correspondent Anne Garrels about the appointment of diplomatic

Now the networks see themselves, and their roles as purveyors of news and information, is central to the reasons that they cover Central America in the patch-work manner they do. The truth of the matter is that they see themselves in →

• slightly schizophrenic way

Look at the multimillion-dollar on-air promotions and print advertisements for ABC's *World News Tonight*, the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather and NBC's *Nightly News*. None says, out front, "We are a **headline service**. We give you a mere fraction of today's news." Yet when one talks to network anchors and news

"Correspondents come in here, get briefed at the bar of the El Camino Real hotel, then get in front of the camera and—in effect—say, 'I'm going to explain to you in the next 30 seconds how the world goes in El Salvador'."

—Gerardo Le Chevallier,
director of information,
Government of El Salvador

executives about news coverage, their litany is not about the completeness of what they do, but about scarcity.

"I don't think anyone can get anything—enough information about anything—out of television to make a full, informed judgment," says NBC's Brokaw. Central America, says Dan Rather, "is a complex story. We get bits and pieces off it on the air.... But to see it anywhere near the context and depth it requires, you've got to read and you've got to think in addition to watching television."

There is another problem, as well. What network news executives seldom admit is that, sometimes, important stories are not covered because there is no video available. For example, one complaint heard from American diplomats serving in Central America and from Central American Government officials is that right-wing violence (which, historically, has been substantial) is given heavy coverage by the U.S. networks, while violence by the left goes virtually unreported.

"Probably not," says Tom Brokaw. "I think

it is harder to cover because it tends to happen in 'remote areas' more." In other words, since there are no pictures, the story tends to be underreported.

Live of the 60 members of the Salvadoran National Assembly—the equivalent of our Congress—were killed by leftist assassins NBC broadcast the fact that one had been shot on Jan. 27. Neither CBS nor ABC covered the murder. On March 14, ABC reported the death of another assemblyman. NBC and CBS were mute. The other three murders went unreported by all three networks.

There is another facet to television's coverage of Central America, too: it can be called the Cronkite Factor. For 19 years, America's most trusted newsmen told his audience, "That's the way it is."

The problem is, much of what you get on television is not the "way it is."

Gerardo Le Chevallier is director of information in the office of Salvadoran president Jose Napoleon Duarte. "The problem with you American correspondents is that you try to put your mind-set over ours. But you can't. Our government is slower than yours. It works differently. Yet American correspondents expect us to operate cameras and—in effect—say, 'I'm going to explain to you in the next 30 seconds how the world goes in El Salvador.' But what the public up there sees is in no way a picture of what's going on in El Salvador."

NBC correspondent Mike Boettcher, a four-year veteran in the region, tends to agree with Le Chevallier. "Being an American, you can't help but see things through American eyes and expect things to be up to our expectations, to our standards. But they're not."

Sometimes, getting such explanations on the air can be difficult. On June 13, 1984, Salvadorean president Duarte re-

some of the worst human-rights abuses

The most dramatic of the changes, according to both U.S. and Salvadoran officials, was his disbanding of the S-2, a 100-man unit of the Treasury Police, which one high-ranking American diplomat in San Salvador said had been giving in-

formation on targets to right-wing death squads. For Duarte, it was a precarious thing to do, given the power of the military audience. "That's the way it is."

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Yet the move was undeniably a bold one, one which would have helped Americans see that there is change—albeit sometimes glacial change—in one country of Central America. For anyone not with certainty to the American people is that there are no immediate answers to its limitations, or its editing process, or its need for visuals.

"One of the things I think we can say

with certainty to the American people is that there are no immediate answers to the problems in Central America. There are no short-term answers. This is not a documenta or a half-hour sitcom at the end of which everything is going to be OK. It is not that way."

Researcher-reporter Caroline L. Morris added in the preparation of this article

watching CBS that night, it was also an invisible change.

Henry Cuenca is the mayor of San Antonio. He was a member of the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Central America headed by Henry Kissinger. Cuenca feels that television news has not done the job in giving us an accurate picture of Central America.

"People ought to be afforded the opportunity to confront the complexity of the situation, and not a surrealistic perception that is the result of either the medium and its limitations, or its editing process, or its need for visuals.

"One of the things I think we can say with certainty to the American people is that there are no immediate answers to its limitations, or its editing process, or its need for visuals.

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